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Contact: Christopher Lorenzana
714-560-7453
Christopher.Lorenzana@sba.gov

**U.S. Small Business Administration Names
Thanh Duc Nguyen, Ph.D.
California Small Business Person of the Year**



SANTA ANA, CA – Thanh Duc Nguyen, Ph.D., Owner, President and CEO of Knowlwood Enterprises, Inc. in Orange County, California, has been named the California Small Business Person of the Year by the U.S. Small Business Administration. Nguyen was selected after competing against tremendous competition throughout the Santa Ana District and the State of California. The district serves Orange, Riverside and San Bernardino Counties. District Director J. Adalberto Quijada announced his selection saying “Thanh Duc

Nguyen excels at combining his academic accomplishments and entrepreneurial talents to transform business ventures. His approach to problem solving and genuine appreciation for customer service exemplify Dr. Nguyen’s illustrious entrepreneurial qualities. He truly deserves the SBA’s ...Small Business Person of the Year Award.” Robert Dodge, from Southland EDC, nominated Nguyen for the honor.

Dr. Nguyen purchased Knowlwood Enterprises in 1998, a chain of 5 casual dining restaurants suffering millions of dollars in losses and in a downward spiral. Knowlwood represented the ideal challenge of entrepreneurship and Dr. Nguyen turned it around during the first year as he projected. Dr. Nguyen stabilized the operations, saved jobs, paid back loans, and prepared to expand into franchising. Since he purchased the business, Knowlwood has never laid off any of its employees. Some employees have been with the company more than 20 years. This speaks to Dr. Nguyen’s commitment to job retention and the well being of his employees.

In 2001, an opportunity emerged to purchase two of the restaurant properties, as well as a third commercial property in 2003, and as Dr. Nguyen put it he was “lucky” to meet Robert Dodge from Southland EDC, an SBA 504 lender. With income from Knowlwood and an SBA 504 loan, Nguyen gained more control of his costs by acquiring the properties.

Nguyen’s keen understanding of the changing tastes of customers has been a key ingredient for success in the restaurant business. Responding to the trend in the food industry toward fresh and nutritious food he has been innovative with his products and has continued to increase his customer base. This explains why Knowlwood earned several “Best” designations by the Orange County Register newspaper survey: Best Hamburger, Best Business Lunch, Best Theme Restaurant and Best Birthday place in 2007. Dr. Nguyen’s team has worked hard to receive the Best Burger Award every year.

Nguyen has a great commitment to education and to socio-economic programs. Knowlwood has a program of Student of the Month Awards that recognizes outstanding students in local schools with certificates and free meals. Knowlwood supports Cal State Fullerton and participates in its annual Arboretum fundraiser. Knowlwood also supports many varied non-profit organizations with donations of free meals and gift certificates to their special causes. Nguyen is an active member of the Santa Ana Kiwanis Club; helping the club develop a more objective way of reviewing, analyzing and selecting students for the Santa Ana Kiwanis’ Foundation which provides college scholarships to Santa Ana students. In addition, he gives generously of his time and resources. He believes strongly in supporting the community, especially to help others help themselves.

Nguyen’s experience of working with people and organizations in socio-economic development, having a loving family and good friends provide him an advantage and supply unwavering hope to take on life’s challenges.

Dr. Thanh Nguyen and other small business owners and champions will be honored at the **45th Annual Small Business Week Awards** on September 25, 2008 at the Hilton Anaheim. For more information on this black tie gala, contact Christopher Lorenzana at 714.560.7453 or christopher.lorenzana@sba.gov .